

ORM NEWS

From the Office of the
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs



May 2003

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



ORM News – Two years and running

ORM News celebrated its second year of publication with the release of our March 2003 edition. Our first issue was published in March 2001. We've presented a variety of topics to keep you abreast of the issues affecting what we do in ORM. ORM News has served as my platform for sharing with you my vision for ORM, to discuss issues of importance, and to "stay in touch." Please keep in mind that ORM News is "your" newsletter and that you can present program information, share best practices, and highlight

both employees and your offices. I'm asking you to share more of what you're doing out in the field, to be a part of the ORM "news" team so that we can share this knowledge with one another.

I've recently asked each manager to submit at least one news article, on the topic of his or her choice, to the newsletter each year. We have teams working on various projects. The newsletter can be used to inform your coworkers about the status of these projects. We are also initiating a new column in this month's edition, entitled "*In Their Own Words*." We're going to feature employees who have found innovative ways for doing their jobs that we believe may be beneficial to others. We're featuring Cheryl Thompson of the Washington Field Office this month.

It's important that we take advantage of every opportunity to share with one another what we're doing and how we're doing it. Communication is the glue that holds us together and propels us forward; the newsletter is a part of that process. Your input is important. Share what you're doing. *Communication is the key!*

James S. Jones.

Articles in this month's edition of ORM News include:

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“How We Treat Each Other Affects the Results that We Achieve”

This is the theme of the executive summary of VA’s *“The Mid-Point Report on the Stress and Aggression in the Workplace Project.”* The report details the efforts that a coalition of stakeholders and academic partners have taken to identify significant workplace stress and aggression factors and to develop interventions to improve the VA work climate, resulting in more efficient and effective service to veterans.

The goal of this report is to help organizations understand the business value of reducing workplace stress, aggression, and violence by linking customized interventions to organizational performance. Some of the findings of this report are:

- Unjust, disrespectful/rude behavior is strongly linked to aggression.
- Respondents experiencing higher levels of aggression are less satisfied, experience greater levels of stress, and report greater intentions to quit VA.
- There are differences in the types of aggression behaviors that supervisors, co-workers and customers exhibit. Customer aggression appears mainly to be active and overt, while most supervisor and co-worker aggression is passive.
- Bullying was identified as a form of aggression. Bullying was defined as persistent patterns of aggression.
- Respondents indicated that they are significantly more bothered when supervisors exhibit bullying than when co-workers or customers exhibit these behaviors.
- Those employees who perceived higher levels of bullying also showed greater stress and an intention to leave the organization.
- An “empowered” work climate is strongly associated with lower stress and aggression and higher employee satisfaction.
- Increased employee satisfaction improves business results.

Six aggressive behaviors were identified as being strongly associated with employee satisfaction and the intention to quit. They are:

- Not given praise for which employees feel they are entitled.
- Treated in a rude and/or disrespectful manner.
- Having their contributions ignored by others.
- Being lied to.
- *Being given unreasonable workloads or deadlines more than others.
- Being shown little empathy/sympathy when having a tough time.

*Being given unreasonable workloads or deadlines more than others might be beyond the control of supervisors as they deal with real business pressure and the need to increase productivity. The remaining five are behaviors that anyone could easily control.

Work climate was the most powerful factor affecting employee satisfaction and is linked to all aspects of the organization. An improved work climate results in reduced stress, lower incidents of aggression, and improved employee satisfaction. This is an important connection because this study showed that employee satisfaction is tied to business results.

The report concludes by saying “We are learning that how we treat each other has a dramatic affect on the results we achieve.”

For more information about the Stress and Aggression in the Workplace Project visit their Web sites at <http://www.va.gov/valu> (Internet) or <http://vaww.va.gov/valu> (VA Intranet).

Terry Washington, ORM External Affairs

EEOC Highlights VA as Having the Best EEO Complaints Processing Times

At a recent EEOC meeting of Federal EEO Directors, VA was highlighted for timely processing of EEO complaints. According to EEOC data, VA had the best processing time for investigations. On another note, EEOC indicated that government-wide; the Department's timeliness on final agency decisions stands out both for procedural determinations and final decisions rendered by the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication.

“In Their Own Words”

As part of our ongoing effort to provide you with useful information, we have initiated a new series ***“In Their Own Words”*** to highlight new or creative methods being used by employees in ORM to do their jobs. We all learn by sharing how we do what we do. We encourage everyone to share information or “best practices” for getting your job done with your coworkers. You can do this by submitting this information, by E-mail, to Terry Washington.

The first employee, to be highlighted is ***Cheryl Thompson*** a Counselor at the Washington Field Office, who will talk about how she manages her time and the process she uses to complete her counseling cases.



“Before I joined ORM in July of 2002, I worked at the Department of Transportation where I had collateral duties that included EEO counseling. In order for me to fulfill my collateral EEO duties, as well as my regular job, I had to figure out a way to do both and be successful at each one. I found that time management was the best avenue for me to pursue, but the question was, how?

I worked out a system that allowed me not only to fulfill my EEO obligations, but also allowed me to be successful at my full-time job as well. Coming to ORM, I had to slightly modify my system because I was not responsible for putting together an administrative file when I was at Transportation.

The system that I developed has worked very well for me. Below are the steps I follow to set up the administrative file and to complete the counseling phase of the complaint within the thirty-day time frame allowed for completing counseling. It needs to be understood that there are factors, such as mediation and other matters, beyond a counselor’s control that may impact their ability to complete every case within the thirty-day time frame.

I have always felt that a counselor should treat EEO matters just as if it was their own EEO complaint. Counselors should provide customer service to the aggrieved; develop a good rapport with the EEO Program Managers in the field, as well as the union representatives. In doing so, processing time can be shortened. First, and foremost, the complaint starts with the initial contact the aggrieved makes to ORM. Once I receive the Initial Contact

report, I have 24 to 48 hours to contact the aggrieved. I use that time period to set up the administrative file.

Here are my time saving steps:

- First, I go into the web-based tracking system (WBTS) to add any pertinent information about the aggrieved, such as their name; address, home and work phone numbers as well as the name of the facility where they work. If the Responsible Management Official (RMO) information and the claims are listed on the Initial Contact report, I add that information to the WBTS as well. I also check to see if the aggrieved has filed prior EEO complaints. I especially look for complaints that are already in the formal complaint process. By doing so, I can go to an Intake specialist and see if the case should be amended or consolidated with an existing complaint.
- Next, I start working on my administrative file electronically. This consists of the following:
 - a. *Rights and Responsibilities.* I fill in all pertinent information about the aggrieved. I make sure I fill in the proper information for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on the jurisdiction that the person lives in.
 - b. *Director's Letter.* Same as with the Rights and Responsibilities, but I make sure I have the RMO information, the nature of the claims and basis, all pertinent dates, as well as the resolution that the aggrieved is seeking.
 - c. *Initial Contact Interview Sheet.* I fill in all pertinent information that I can before I formally interview the aggrieved, explaining their rights and responsibilities as well as about ORM. Once I start the initial interview, I have this document ready on my computer screen, and as I interview the aggrieved, I add information as I am talking to them. Once I complete the initial contact, I send out the Rights and Responsibilities, and the Director's Letter. At that point, I need to only add information that may not have been present on the Initial Contact report, such as the name of the RMO. I make sure I have envelopes ready for mailing as soon as I talk with the aggrieved. I make copies of the Rights and Responsibilities, Director's letter, (along with the confirmation fax sheet) and I put copies of these documents in my numbered (1-15) file that I prepared previously.
 - d. *Notice of Right to File.* I add information such as aggrieved person's personal information (name, address, and telephone

number), claims, basis, and the resolution asked for by the aggrieved.

- e. ***Counselor's Report.*** Once I have the information from the initial interview, I transfer that information to the Counselor's report. I make sure that I have the allegation that the aggrieved is stating, along with the names of the RMO and any witnesses. As I talk to the RMO and other witnesses, I have the report visible on my computer, and I add the RMO and witness information as I am discussing the complaint with them. I make sure that I edit the report after I talk to each person, so that when I am ready to give the aggrieved the final interview, I will have not only a finished counselor's report, but I only have to add in the date of the final interview. Once I have finished contacting the witnesses and RMO, I am ready to give the aggrieved his or her final interview. Once I have given the aggrieved their final interview, I mail out the Notice of Right to File. My report is finished, and is ready to print. I print the report, make copies, along with the Notice of Right to File, and place them in the file. I then forward the administrative file to the Intake Specialist for further review."

Cheryl attributes her process for reducing the time it takes her to complete the counseling phase of her cases. Cheryl averages 8 counseling cases per month. From 10/1/02 to 3/31/03, she averaged 16 days for counseling without ADR, the national average in FY 2002 was 26.5 days, and 80 days for counseling with ADR, the national average in FY 2002 was 61 days.

Cheryl also shared this concept with Renee Bragg, EEO Counselor. Renee said this about using Cheryl's process, "I find that taking the extra time to type the Counselor's Report during the informal process, instead of waiting until the procedure has ended, has assisted me in completing the report in a timely manner. Combining Cheryl's technique, along with time management techniques of my own, definitely has made my job much easier, to the point I don't feel rushed when the informal process has ended. Most times I am submitting my Counselor's Report on the same day the Notice of Right to File a Formal Complaint is issued, or no more than four days later, which has improved my count. This procedure may not work for everyone, but I am grateful to Cheryl for sharing a procedure that works for me."

Please contact Cheryl Thompson for more information or to share your ideas on the counseling process.

Terry Washington, External Affairs Program

Office Notes

Vancouver Field Office/Western Operations

As many of you know, Ms. **Marsha Martin**, former EEO Counselor, passed away April 9, 2003. A memorial service was held on April 21, 2003, in the chapel of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System - Sepulveda Campus. We would like to thank the ORM family for joining us in our remembrance of Marsha.

ORM Western Operations (Palo Alto, Los Angeles and Vancouver offices) would like the ORM family to join them in applauding **Tony Denogean**, Administrative Officer/Intake Specialist, at the Los Angeles Division on his recent receipt of a very handsome certificate from VA Employee Education Services (EES) for his many years of dedication, hard work, support and commitment to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employee distant education program.

During the week of April 14-18, 2003, we held a joint Basic Mediation training session with selected employees from VISN 20 facilities. Responses to the training indicated that it was a real success, meeting and exceeding their expectations. We want to give special thanks to one of our own, **Karen Civitate**, who served as one of the four instructors conducting the training. *Thanks Karen for a job well done!*

Human Resources (HR)

John Sampson, HR Specialist, is leaving ORM to become the Denver Human Resources Director for Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). On Friday, May 2nd ORM employees, throughout the country, were able to say farewell to John via our inter-office teleconferencing system. John will be remembered for his quiet demeanor and professionalism. We wish John good luck in his new endeavor.

Organizational Climate Assessment Program (OCAP)

Ralph Charlip, Director, Health Administration Center in Denver, Colorado, sent a thank you note to **Lamont Johnson**, OCAP Manager, upon the completion of a recent OCAP assessment at his facility. Mr. Charlip said *"Thank you for leading a great team and helping assess our organization – a very valuable experience. We look forward to your visit in 2004."*

Washington Field Office

Renee King, EEO Counselor, served as a co-mediator with **Gwendolyn Gantt**, EEO Investigator, in a mediation session at VA Central Office on April 16, 2003. The parties involved reached a settlement of their issues with the assistance of both Renee and Gwen. The co-mediation process, used during this mediation, is essential in producing tomorrow's mediators. Congratulations to Renee for successfully completing her first mediation and to Gwen for continuing to share her knowledge and expertise in the areas of mediation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR).

John Jones, C-1 Specialist, conducted diversity training at the Martinsburg, VA Medical Center, in Martinsburg, West Virginia on April 17, 2003.

Gwendolyn Gantt, EEO Investigator/Mediator also participated and gained experience that will enable her to conduct diversity training in the future. The facility Director stated that he would be asking that John return to conduct additional training for the entire staff of the medical center.

Houston Field Office

We rarely hear from the Houston ORM Field Office. It appears they took last month's article, "Signs of Anxiety Show in the Workplace," seriously. The employees enjoyed a food fest and Easter Egg Hunt! They rushed to locate the candies hidden throughout the office by their Field Manager, **Paul Crain**. Prizes were awarded for "*Best Basket, Most Eggs Collected, and I Survived the Hunt.*"

In continuing the spirit of Easter, the staff donated a "care box" filled with an assortment of goodies to a Salvation Army shelter for battered women and their children.

Staff members have been busy conducting Sexual Harassment Training. **John Seguin** conducted training at the Houston VA Regional Office, and Lee Staggers did the training at the Houston VA Medical Center.

The fragrance of roses filtered throughout the office. In honor of "Administrative Professionals Day," Mr. Crain surprised each of the EEO Program Assistants with a half dozen roses.

National Administrative Assistants (AA) Day

Patricia Johnson, Administrative Assistant, Office of Policy and Compliance, attended a 1-day workshop training course entitled, "*Moving at the Speed of Change: Celebrating Administrative Professional's Day 2003*". This workshop was in observance of "National Administrative Assistants (AA) Day," April 23, 2003. This workshop was held at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in Washington, DC.

James V. Pritchert, VACO Education Service Representative, was the organizer of this workshop, which was funded through the Employee Education System. Instructors were Charles (Skip) Pettit, Founder and Motivational Speaker of the International Training Consortium, Inc., Rockville, MD and Jackie Middleton, Founder & Senior Partner/ Training & Organization Development Specialist of New Dimensions Group, Columbia, MD.


The workshop's objective was to help administrative professionals identify and act on issues affecting their role in the workplace. A theme discussed in the workshop was *"A beginning introspective thought-provoking opportunity critical to Long-Term success."*

"Hot" topics discussed during the workshop were (1) Organizational Factors- The Federal Climate, (2) Finding Opportunities in Change, Transition & Resistance, (3) What Gets In The Way, (4) Managing Stress In Times of Changes (Video), (5) Who Moved My Cheese (Video & Activity) and (6) Action Planning.

Strategies suggested to help career advancement in the administrative assistant field were:

1. Agree on a common goal
2. Learn the abilities of others
3. Communicate effectively
4. Sharpen you individual skills, and
5. Execute consistently

Mr. Pritchert promised to conduct additional workshops on subjects of interest to administrative assistants to keep them abreast of new and challenging changes in their field.



Did You Know?



New Health Revenue Center Web Page for Requesting Forms

The Health Revenue Center has announced a new web page to offer Life Event packages that include links to individual forms.

Employees can access this web page from their desktop or access point at each VA facility. The Web site address is

<http://vaww.lep.va.gov>.

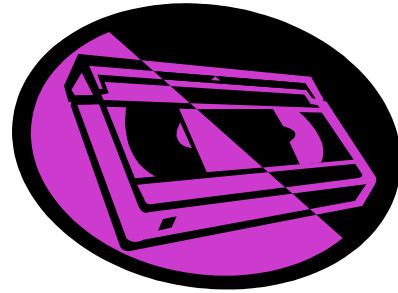
A Life Even Package (LEP) is a collection of forms an/or information to assist you, the employee, in making changes to your personnel records and benefits. Each LEP provides information and a checklist to inform employees of the various steps to help them make changes needed for certain life events. Checklists, forms, and information can be printed directly from the web page and/or by using the links provided.

Information and forms are available on the following topics:

- *New Hire information*
- *Family Status Changes*
- *Separation from the VA*
- *Changes in Work Status*
- *Health Insurance Issues*
- *Pre-Retirement Planning*
- *Death of an Active Employee, Spouse, or Child*

Maximizing Employee Satisfaction Video and Supervisor Toolbox Website

The Employee Education System, Cleveland Resource Center, in collaboration with St. Louis Employee Education Resource Center is pleased to announce the Maximizing Employee Satisfaction video and Supervisor Toolbox Website. The video looks into national survey data to focus on issues explaining why people become dissatisfied in their current positions and why some employees choose to leave the VA altogether. By focusing on employees' perceptions of the workplace, supervisors can actively attempt to create an environment where employees contribute in positive and meaningful ways. Creating a positive work environment is beneficial for our employees but it also benefits our clients.



The Supervisor Toolbox is designed as an Online Resource for supervisors and trainers. This site provides supervisors with a central repository for all the information you need to support your leadership role within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Maximizing Employee Satisfaction video is the first in the series of "Leadership Skills For VA Supervisors" programs.

Visit the Supervisor Toolbox Web site at http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/supervisor/supervisor_toolbox/index.htm to see future videos and additional supervisory resources. The video will be shown on VAKN beginning in May. For a broadcast schedule go to http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=16297.

If you have any questions, please contact John McQuaid at 440 526-3030 ext. 6652 or by e-mail [John McQuaid](mailto:John.McQuaid@va.gov) or [Diane Gorsek](mailto:Diane.Gorsek@va.gov) at 440 526-3030 ext. 6633.

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